



A Call to Minimize Distraction & Respect Users' Attention

By a concerned PM & entrepreneur

[go/distraction](#)

I'm concerned about how we're
making the world **more distracted**

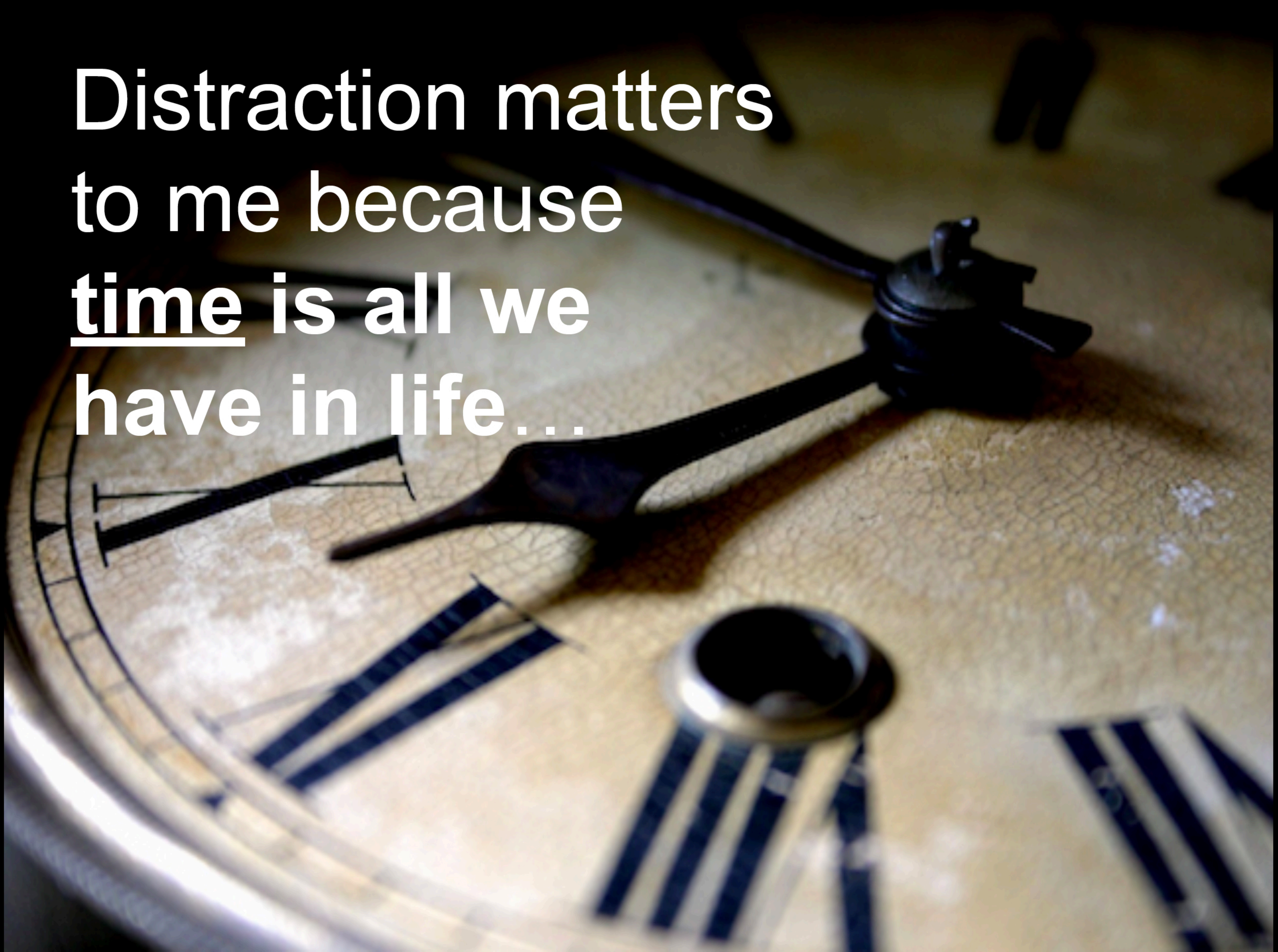
And my goal with this presentation
is to **create a movement** at Google...

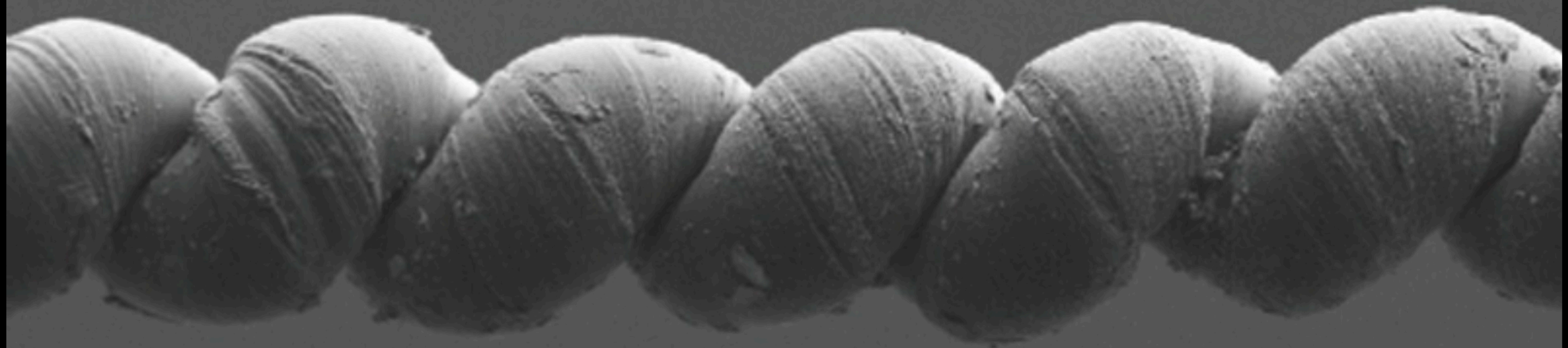
... to create a new design ethic that
aims to **minimize distraction**

**and I'd like to
get your help.**

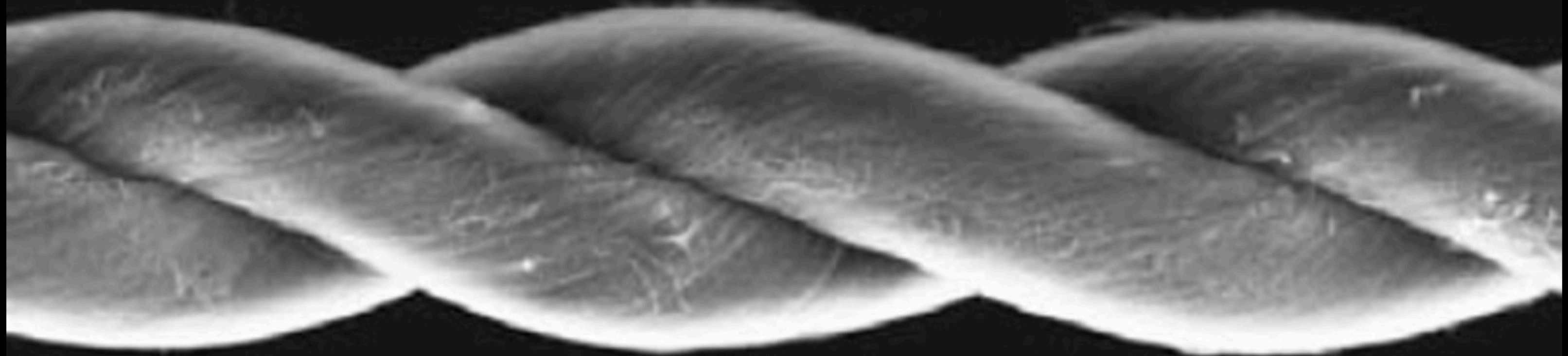


Distraction matters
to me because
time is all we
have in life....

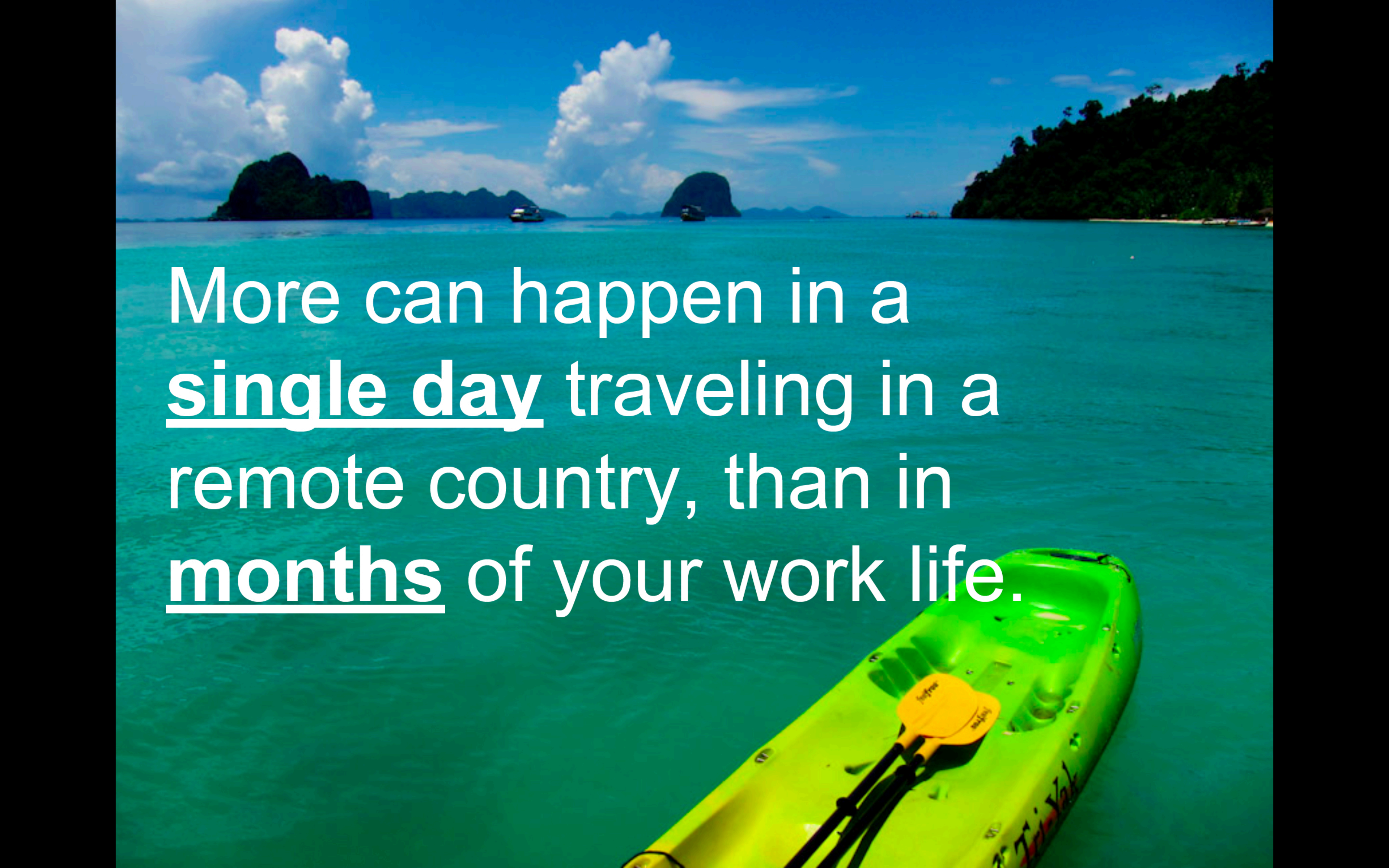





... time is expanded and contracted when
we're in flow vs. distracted.



You've experienced
this before...

A vibrant tropical seascape with turquoise water, distant islands, and a bright yellow kayak in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the water. The kayak is yellow with a black paddle and the word "Tri-Yak" is visible on its side. The background features lush green islands under a blue sky with white clouds.

More can happen in a
single day traveling in a
remote country, than in
months of your work life.

A man and a woman are dancing on a stage. The woman, on the left, has blonde hair and is wearing a gold, sequined, strapless dress and high heels. She is smiling and has her arms outstretched. The man, on the right, is wearing a yellow short-sleeved shirt and black pants with a gold stripe down the side. He is looking towards the woman and has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a stage with blue and purple lighting and a band is visible in the distance.

Or in one hour
of dancing...



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COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

Starred ★

Sent Mail

Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat

Hiking Fan

Set status here ▾

Call none

Ariel

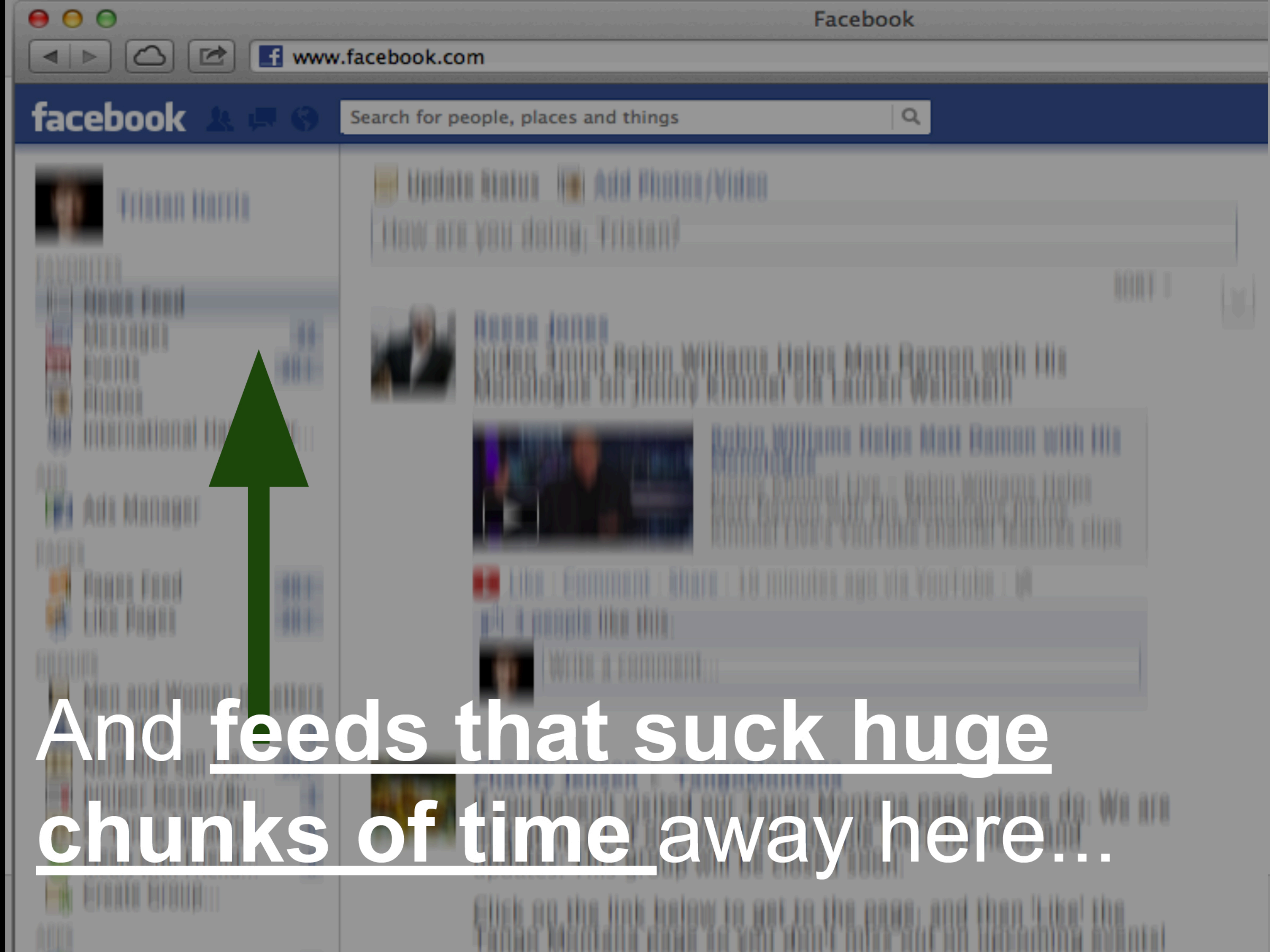
Emily

Jason

Michael

Paul

<input type="checkbox"/>	★	Jason Cornwell	» Please return my stapler - Hi, You seem to have taken my stapler. Please,	1:10 pm
<input type="checkbox"/>	★	Paul McDonald	» Fun Hike Yesterday! - Thanks for the great hike yesterday, it was awesome	1:06 pm
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<input type="checkbox"/>	★	Google Voice	» New voicemail from (619) 810-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from: (619) 810-5	Mar 6



And feeds that suck huge
chunks of time away here...

A photograph of three young men standing in a forest, all looking down at their smartphones. The man on the left wears a bright yellow beanie and a purple jacket over a brown shirt. The man in the middle has curly brown hair and wears a green jacket. The man on the right wears a grey knit hat with a moose pattern, glasses, and a grey hoodie. In the background, there are tall trees and a wooden cabin with a green door. A semi-transparent black bar with white text is overlaid across the bottom half of the image.

...weakening our relationships to
each other here



...and destroying our kids'
ability to focus here

(teens 13-17 now send 4,000 texts/month,
once every 6 minutes awake)

An aerial night photograph of New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous illuminated skyscrapers and buildings. The city lights reflect on the water in the foreground, and the overall scene is bathed in the warm glow of city lights against a dark sky. The text "And today..." is superimposed in the center of the image.

And today...

Technology companies
profoundly influence where
all this attention goes...

In fact...



Never before in history...

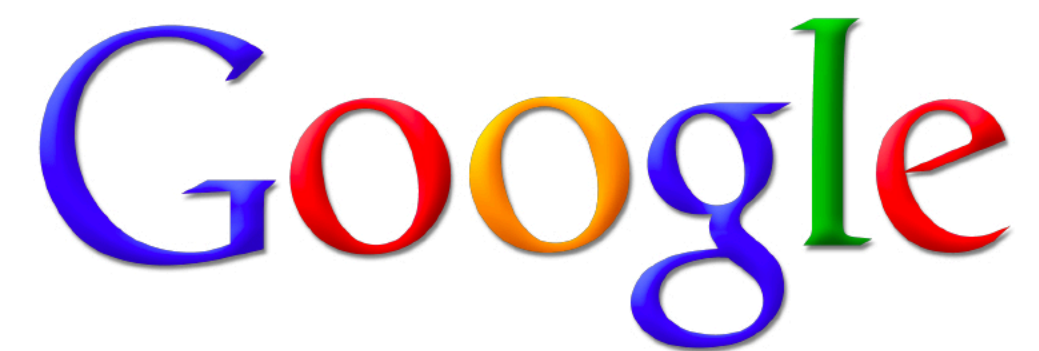
...have the decisions of a **handful** of designers...



(mostly men, white, living in SF, aged 25-35)



... working at 3 companies ...



facebook®

had

so

much



impact

on how millions of people around the world spend their attention



think about that for a second...



We should **feel...**

A pair of hands, one from the bottom left and one from the bottom right, are gently holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe shows the Americas, with North and South America visible in green and yellow, surrounded by blue oceans and white clouds. The background is a solid black. Overlaid on the center of the globe is the text "...an enormous responsibility" in white, with the word "enormous" underlined.

...an enormous responsibility

A pair of hands, one from the bottom left and one from the bottom right, are gently holding a small, realistic-looking globe of the Earth. The globe is tilted, showing the Americas. The text "to get this right." is written in a white, sans-serif font across the center of the globe. The background is a solid black, making the globe and hands stand out. The lighting on the hands and globe is soft, highlighting the textures of the skin and the details of the Earth's surface, including clouds and landmasses.

to get this right.

The Washington Post

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28 percent of accidents involve talking, texting on cellphones


By Ashley Halsey III
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, January 13, 2010


Twenty-eight percent of traffic accidents occur when people talk on cellphones or send text messages while driving, according to a study released Tuesday by the [National Safety Council](#).

THIS STORY

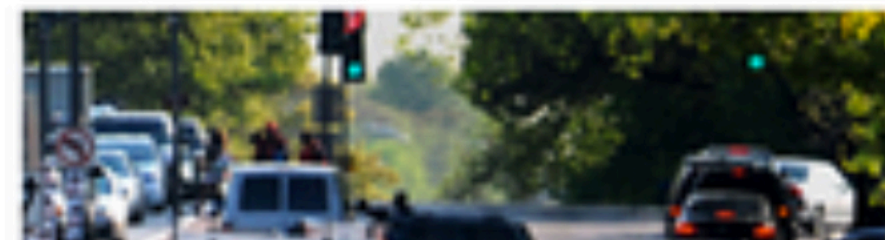
- [More drivers texting on Beltway, study](#)

top **Network News**


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**We need to be more rigorous
about these questions than...**

A person with dark hair, wearing a dark blue shirt, is seen from the back, sitting at a desk. In front of them is a silver laptop with a black keyboard and a large black monitor displaying code. The background shows a modern office with other people and desks.

“Why don't we make it buzz your phone every time you get an email?”

Now, you might be saying...

Wait a sec, don't users make
their **own choices** here?

Not always...

1. We need to acknowledge that humans have certain **vulnerabilities...**



2. Those vulnerabilities can be amplified and exploited...



3. ... and the design of products we make can do this, and make people act impulsively..



Every day, those **vulnerabilities** make us
act against our better judgement...

Vulnerability #1: Bad Forecasting (aka “That won't take long”)

facebook

[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

[See Photo](#)

[Go to Notifications](#)

what question are we
really being asked?

facebook

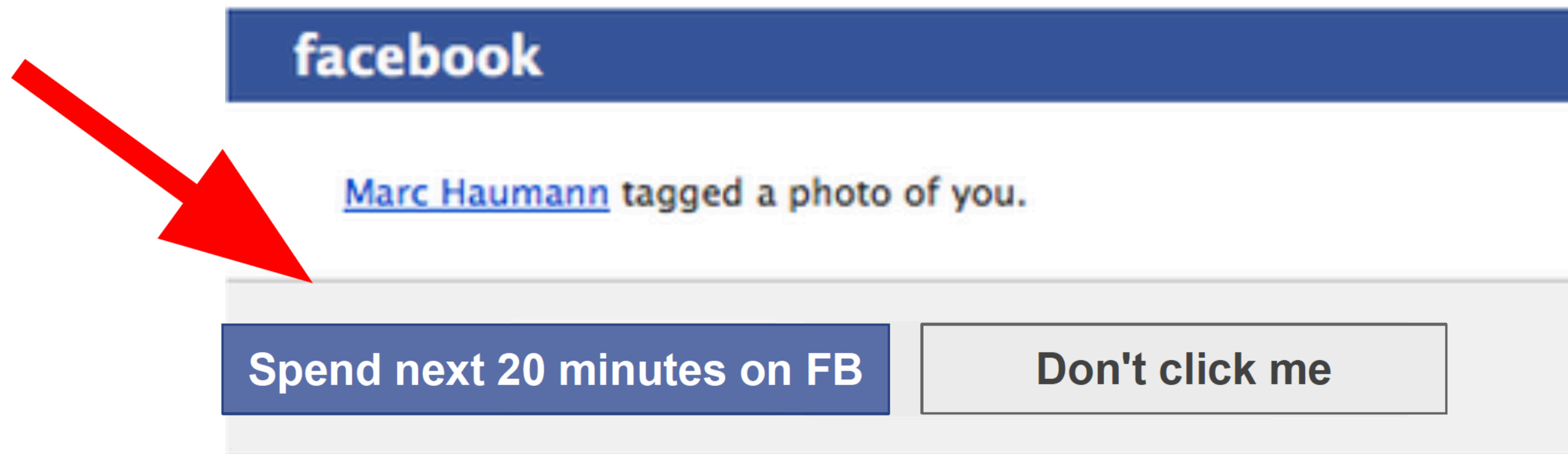
[Marc Haumann](#) tagged a photo of you.

See Photo

Go to Notifications


“Want to see this photo of you?”


or more like...




“Do you want to interrupt what you're doing and spend next 20 minutes on Facebook?”


Post To Your Wall





Falcons TV | Top Combine Performances
<http://atlantafalcons.com/falconstv>
The NFL Network crew counts down their 10 best performances from the prospects at the 2012 NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis

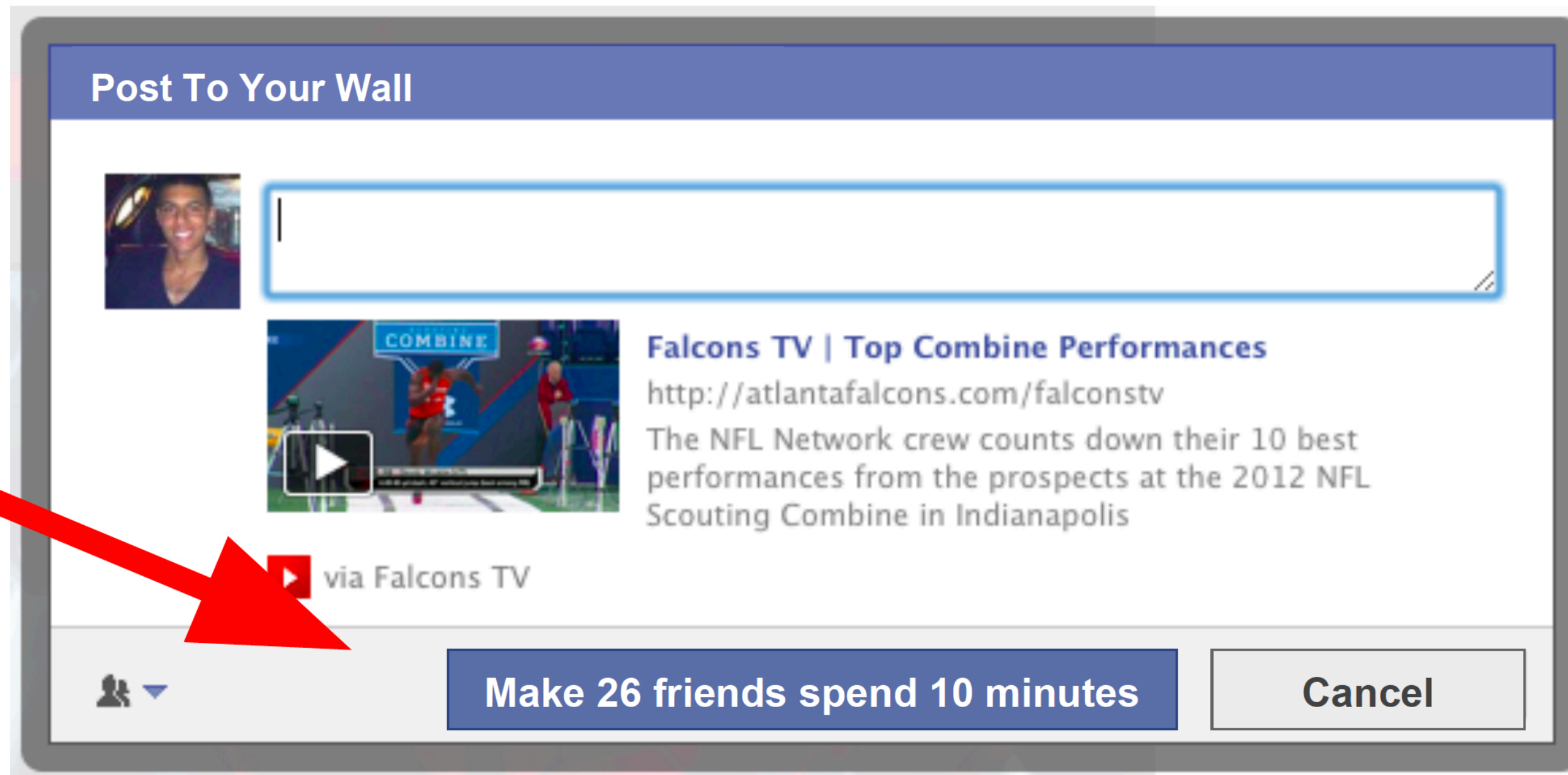
 via Falcons TV

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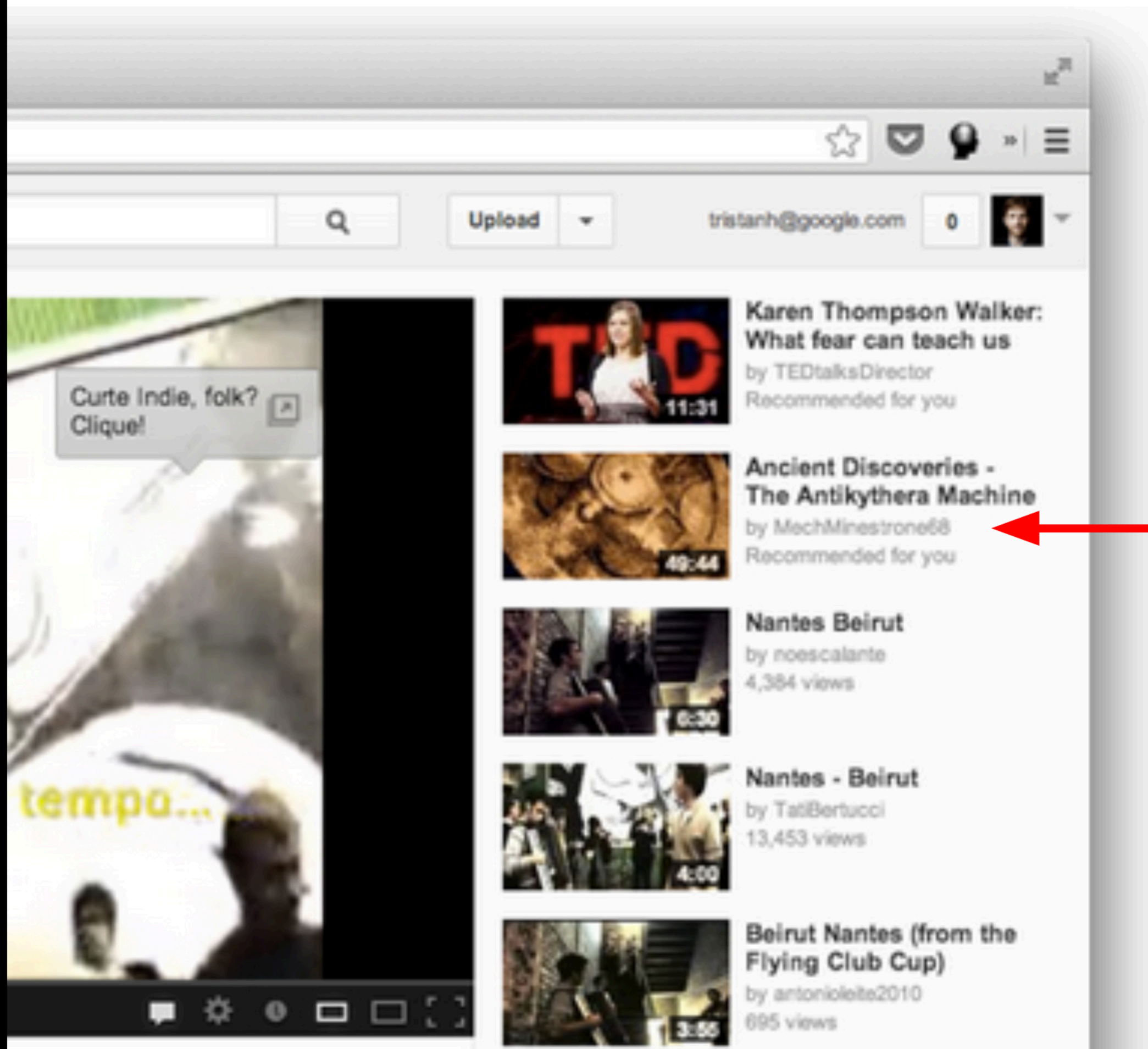
Share

Cancel

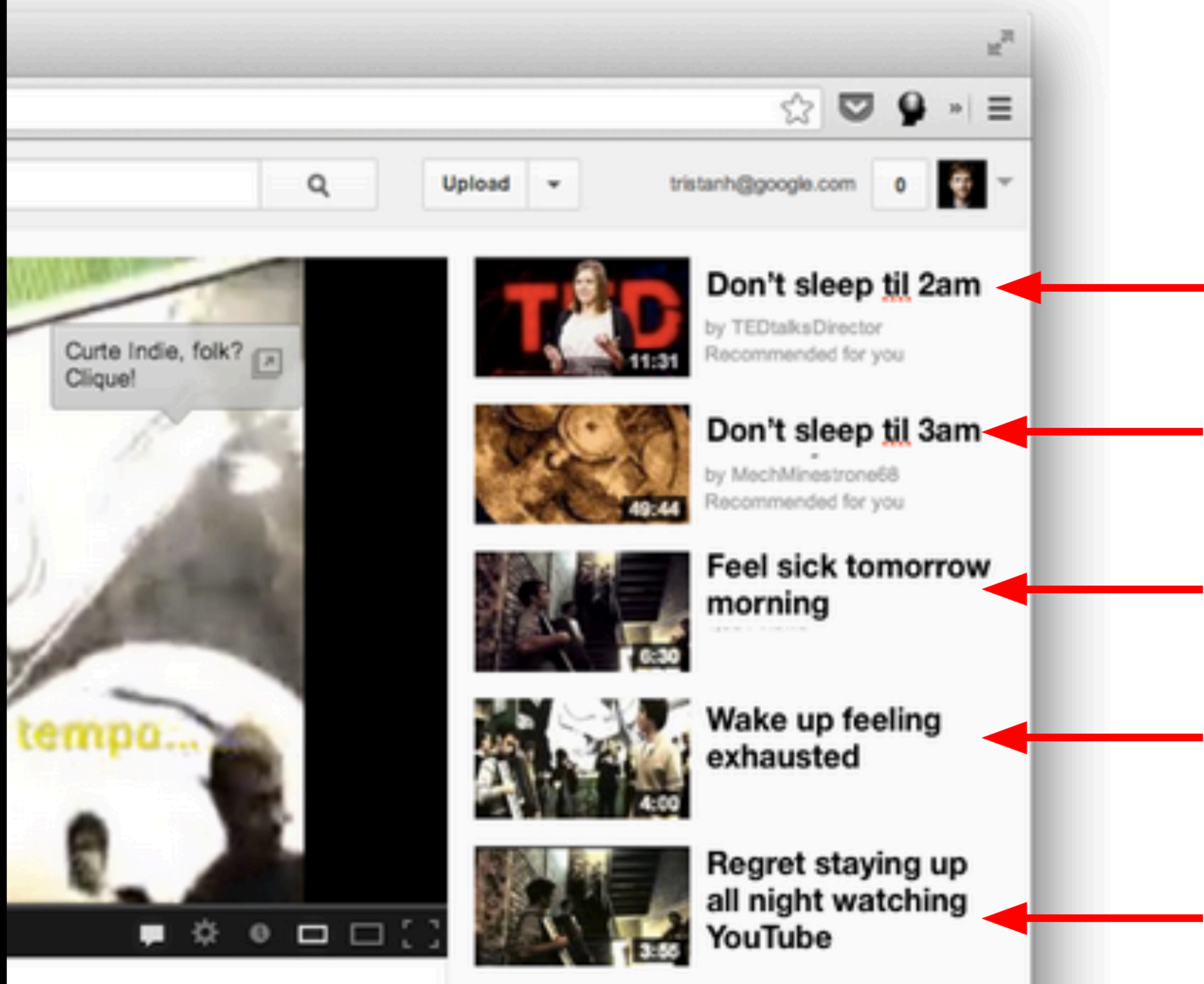
“Share this article?”



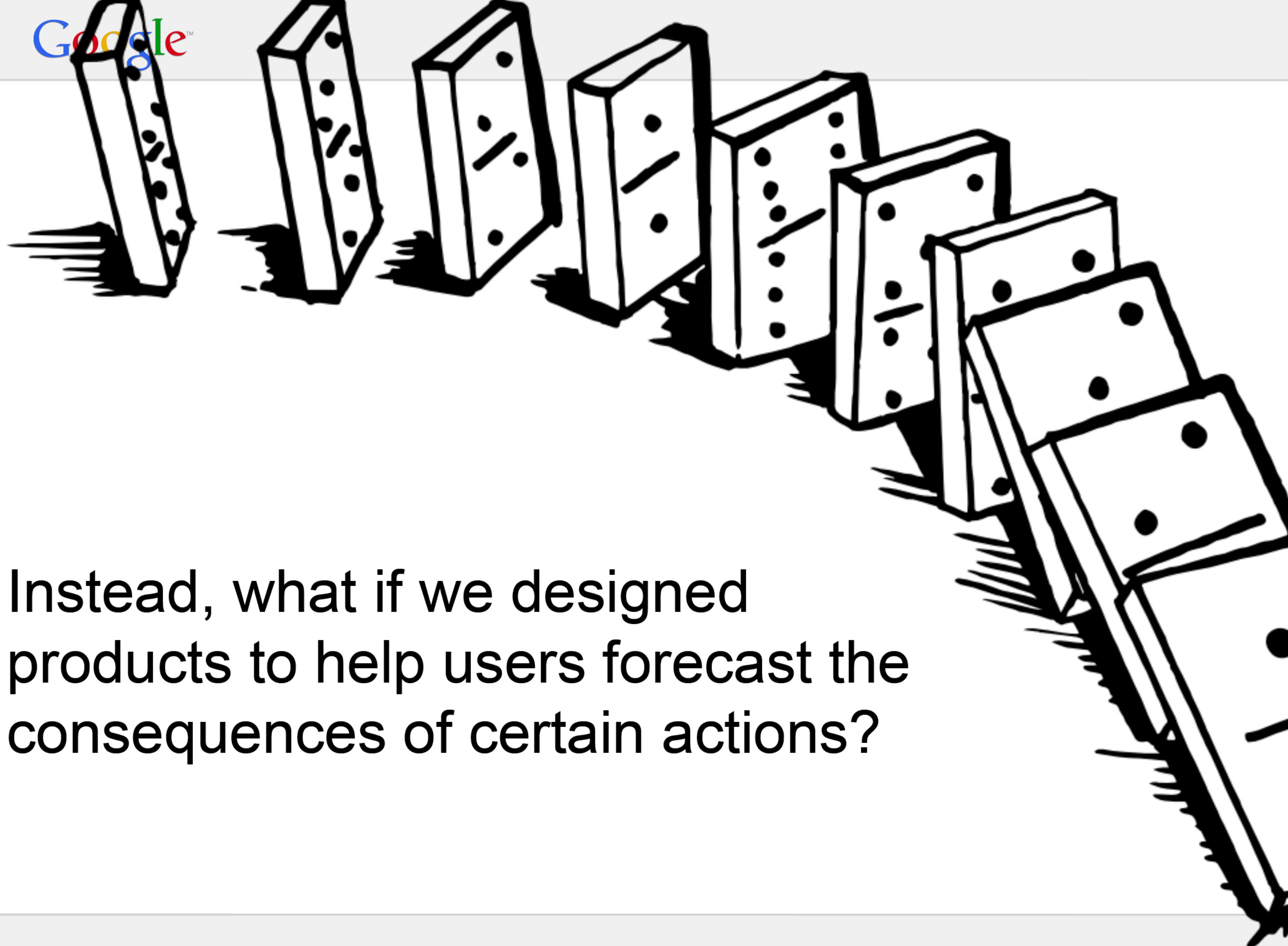
“Make ~26 friends spend 10 minutes reading this?”



Watch a related video?

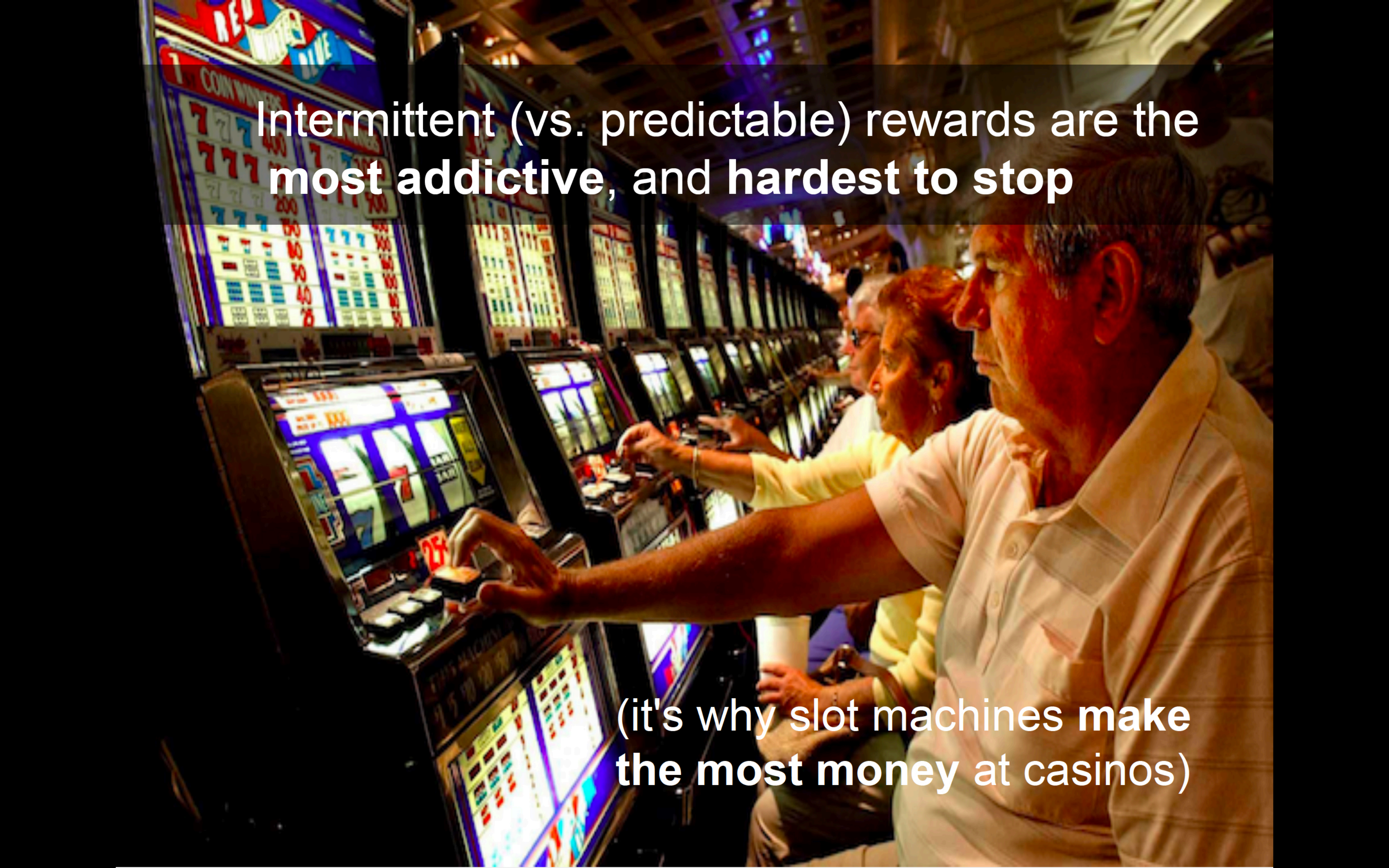


or...



Instead, what if we designed products to help users forecast the consequences of certain actions?

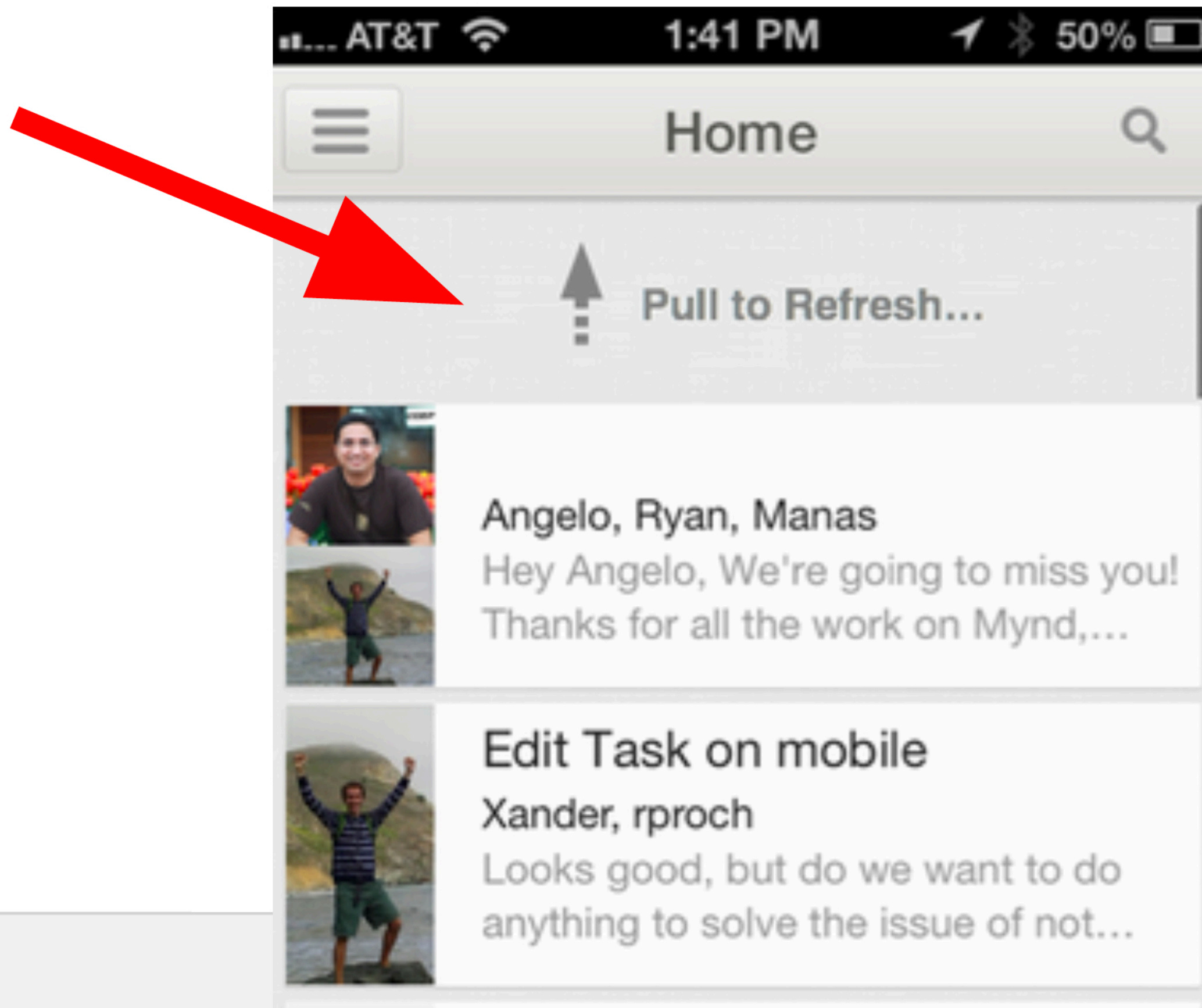
Vulnerability #2: Intermittent variable rewards (aka Slot Machines)



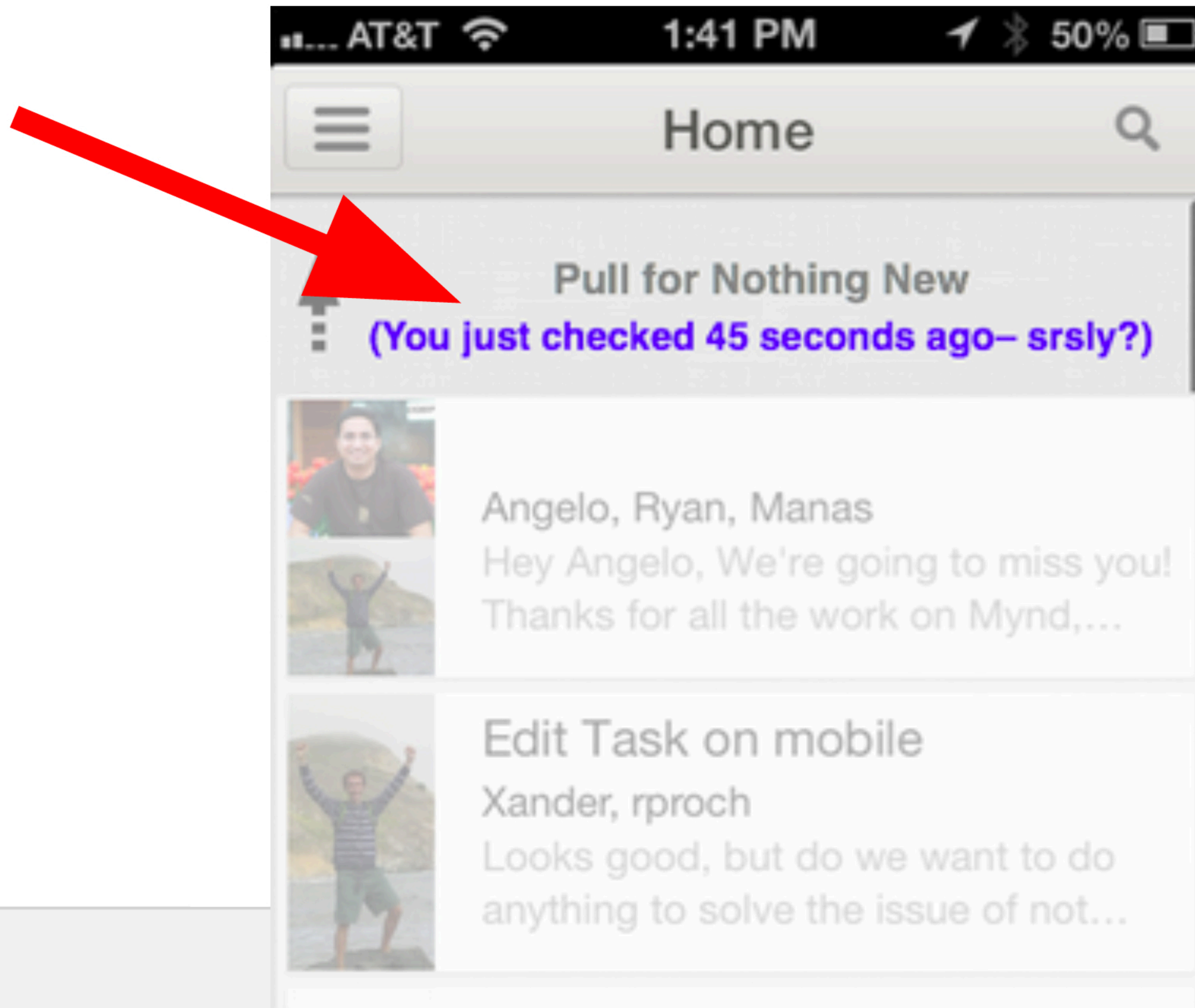
Intermittent (vs. predictable) rewards are the most addictive, and hardest to stop

(it's why slot machines make the most money at casinos)

are we deciding to pull for new email?



... or do we do it to feel the intermittent rewards?



... are we **swiping**
two fingers to scroll?



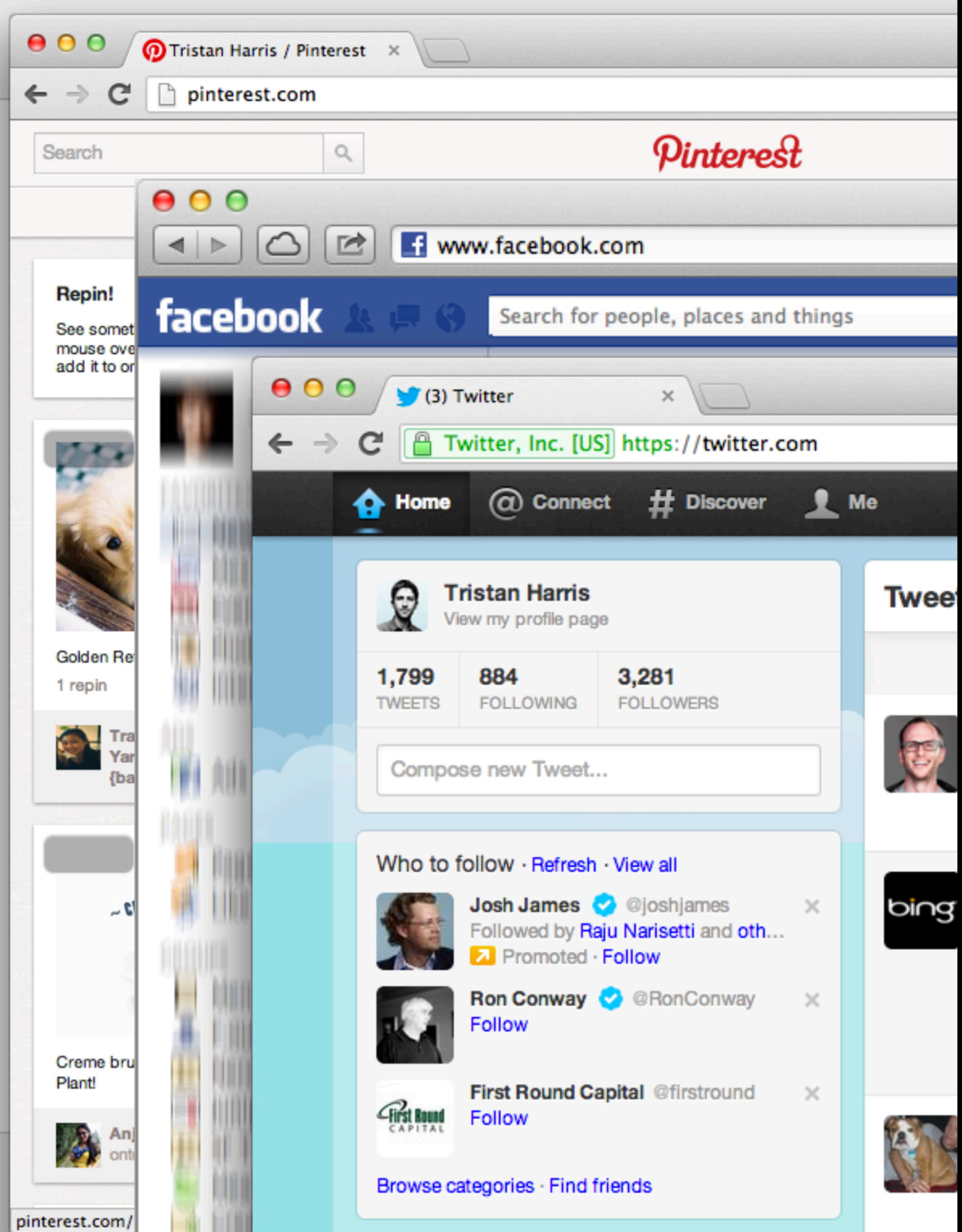
... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



... or playing the ~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



... or playing the
~~slot machines~~
infinite feeds to see
what we'll get?



These are attention casinos...



...because the house always wins.
We spend lots of time – are we getting the same value back?



Instead, what if we designed to
minimize the presence of
intermittent variable rewards, and
reduce addictions?

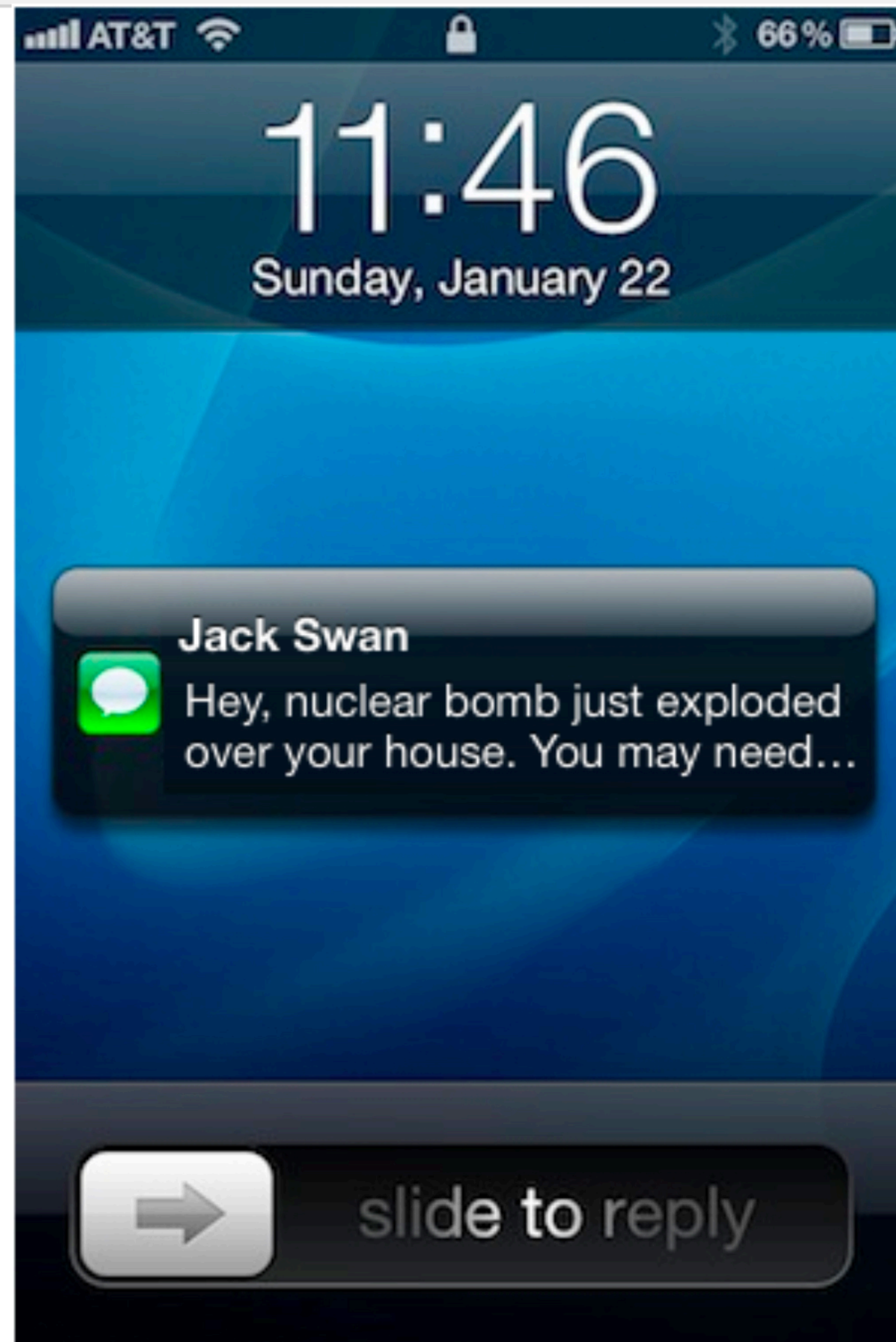
Vulnerability #3: Loss-Aversion (aka Fear of Missing Out)

Suppose we actually
wanted to stop checking
all this stuff...

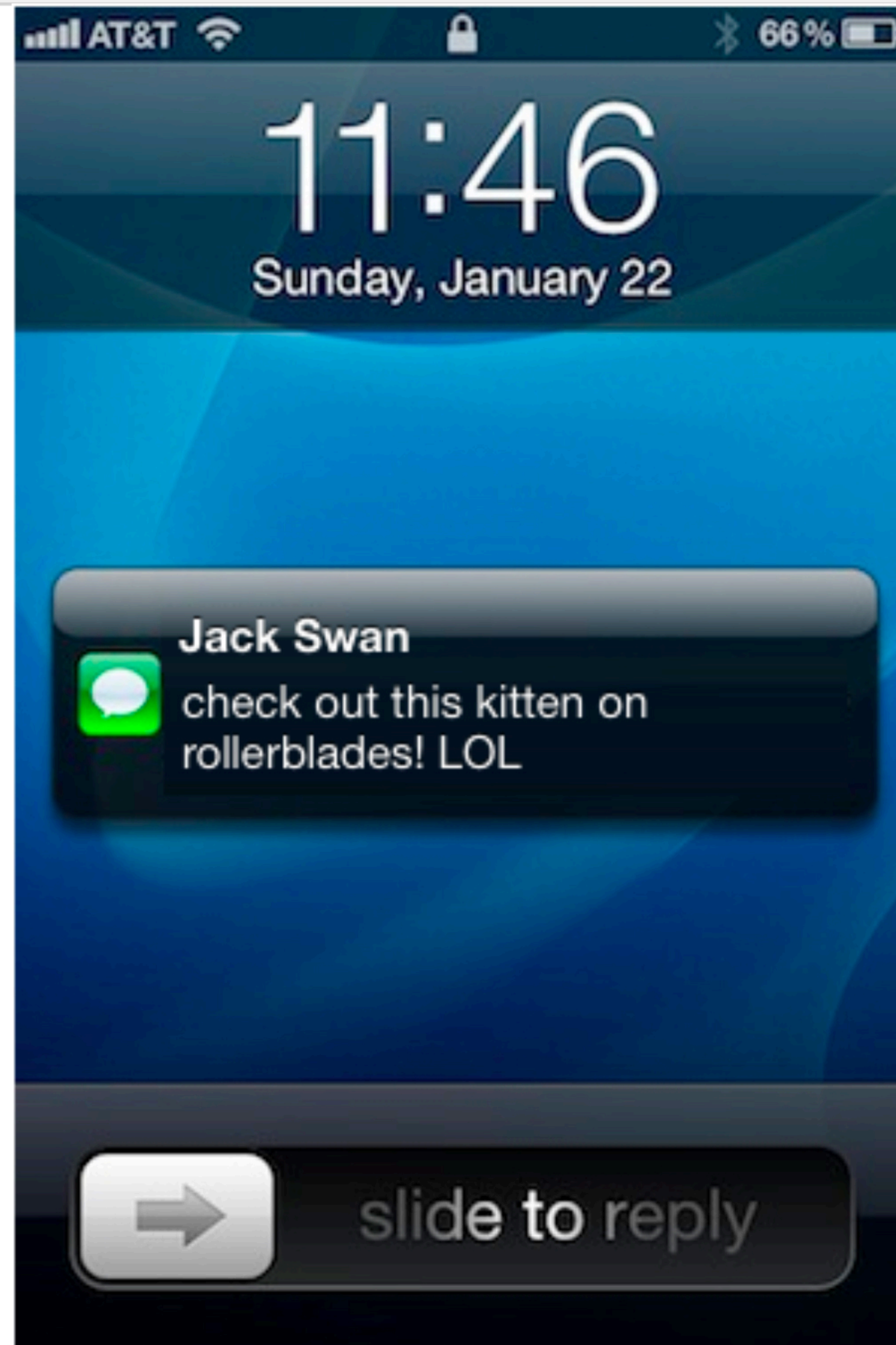
A black and white photograph of a woman with a shocked expression. Her mouth is wide open in an 'O' shape, and her eyes are wide. She has one hand covering her mouth and another hand on her forehead. She is wearing a dark top and a necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Loss-aversion won't let us,
because we'd be terrified of missing
something important**

so we're forced to live as if every
message could be this...



instead of this...



A low-angle, close-up shot of a row of treadmills in a gym. The focus is on the lower legs and feet of several people running. The legs are in various stages of a stride, creating a sense of motion. The treadmills are dark-colored with silver handrails. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the gym environment.

**Keeping us on a treadmill
of continuous checking**

Instead, what if we designed to
give users confidence that they
could disconnect more often, and
not miss something important?

Vulnerability #4:
Fast vs. Slow Thinking
(aka Mindful vs. Mindless behavior)

Humans make different decisions
when we **pause and consider**,
vs. when we **react immediately**.

When access to the next hit is
too frictionless, we *lose the ability*
to consider before acting...



When scrolling is **frictionless**, we don't **think** before we flick to see what's next...



or when it's
so frictionless,
we don't think
before we grab our
phone after it
buzzes



© 2008 CNET Networks, Inc.



...or so frictionless, we don't think before getting a snack after an urge.

When we **lose that moment to consider**
before acting on our impulses...



... we lose what sets us apart as
thinking humans.

Instead, what if we designed to help users be **fast and efficient**, while leaving *enough friction* for users to **pause and consider**?



...just like Google
makes unhealthy food
available, but puts them
inside jars and slightly
out of sight

(in other words, behind a **speed bump**)

Vulnerability #5: Stress & Altered States

(aka “I’m not in the best state of mind to decide...”)

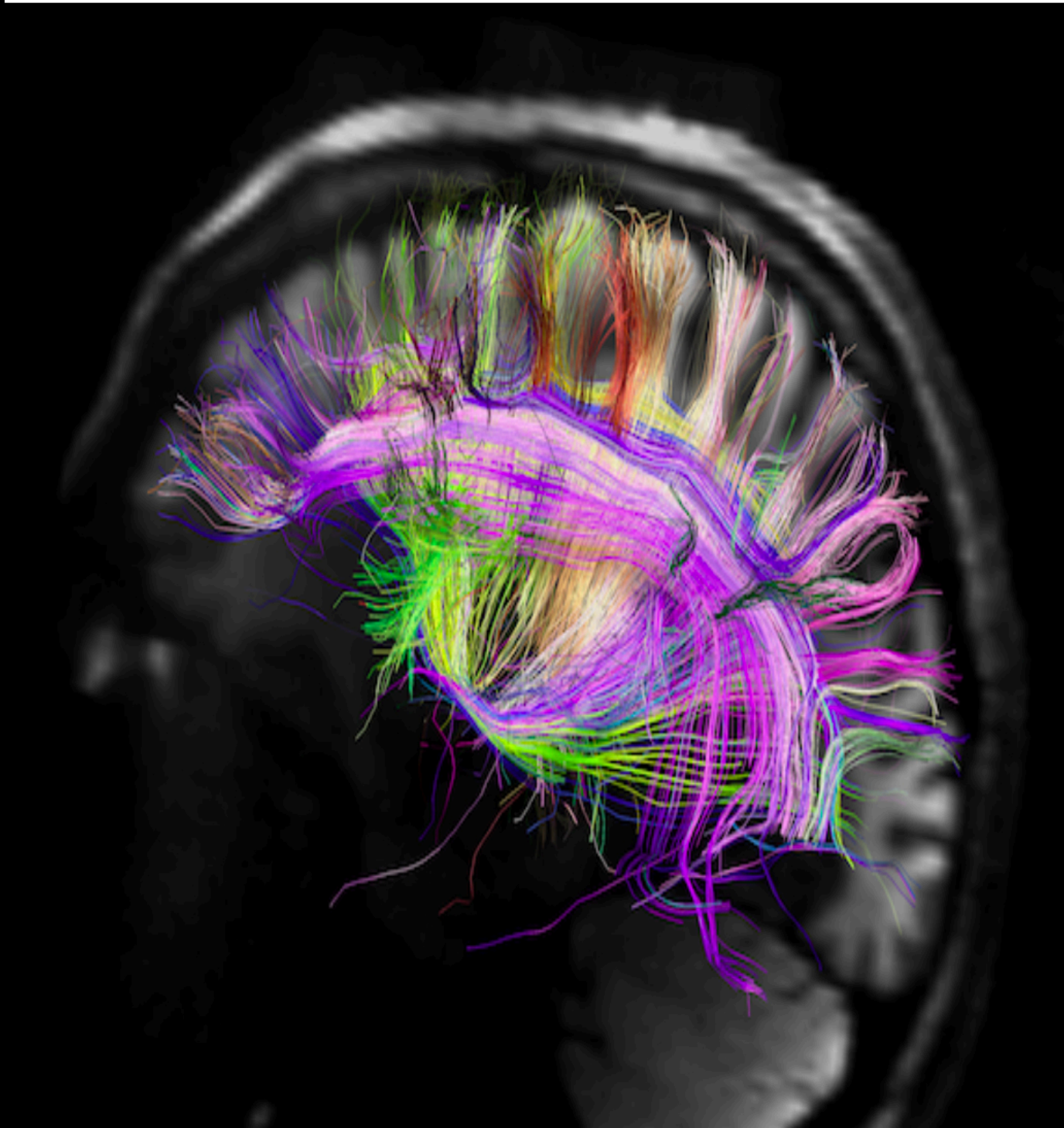
It's not just how technology changes
what we do...

It's also how it changes
our physiological state...



We actually
stop breathing when
we read our email...

(an effect known as “email apnea”)



...our
**sympathetic
nervous system**
is activated



**...causing our liver
to dump glucose
and cholesterol
into our blood...**

...our heart rate increases...



...and our body prepares for a
fight or flight response





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Labels ▾

More ▾

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COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

Starred ★

Sent Mail

Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat

Hiking F

Set status here ▾

Call phone

Arielle

Emily

Jason

Michael

Paul

		Jason Cornwell	» Please return my stapler - Hi, You seem to have taken my stapler. Please,	1:10 pm
		Paul McDonald	» Fun Hike Yesterday! - Thanks for the great hike yesterday, it was awesome	1:06 pm
		Arielle Reinstein	» July 4th weekend - Hi there: I heard you'll be around this weekend and I'd lo	Jun 28
		JS Bach	» Tonhalle concert Friday - Hey man, there's a great concert this Friday evenir	Jun 22
		Christine Chiu	» Hi Hiking, Looking for opinion on my diet/fitness app - Hi Hiking, I bumped ir	Jun 9
		Yan Tseytlin (2), Draft	» Hey there! - I heard you found a great place to go hiking. Let me know when	Mar 28
		Kenneth, me (2)	» Group dinner? - Sushi sounds great! On Fri, Mar 25, 2011 at 10:06 AM, Ken	Mar 25
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		Jr Wikane	» VW Auction in Tacoma - Hi, I was doing a search on Google for VW's in Tac	Mar 6
		Google Mail	» New mail from: (610) 810.1	Mar 6

And all that happens between when
we read our 1st email...



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Mail

COMPOSE MAIL

Inbox (3)

Starred ★

Sent Mail

Drafts (2)

+ Hiking (3)

Urgent!

12 more ▾

Chat

Search, add or in

Hiking Fan

Set status here ▾

Call phone

Arielle

Emily

Jason

Mike

Paul



Archive

Report spam

Delete



Move to ▾

Labels ▾

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1 - 15 of 15



Jason Cornwell

» Please return my stapler - Hi, You seem to have taken my stapler. Please,

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Mike

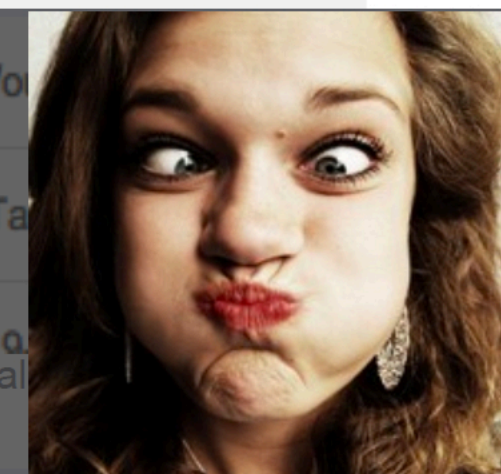
» VW Audi or Il - Hi I'm doing a search on Google for VW's in Ta

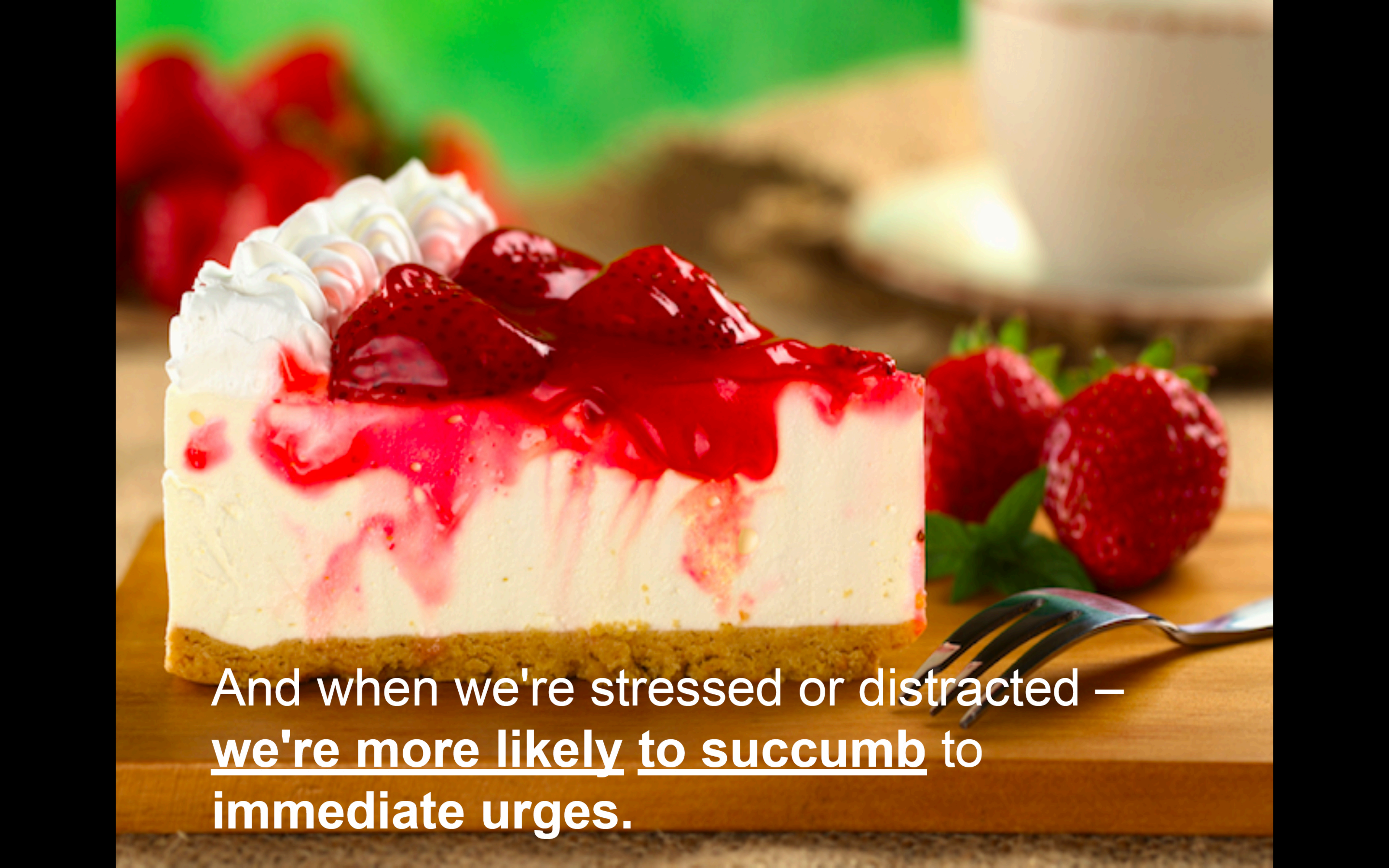


Google Voice

» New voicemail from (610) 810-5507 at 5:10 AM - Voicemail from: (610) 810-

Google Confidential

and when we read our 10th email...


A close-up photograph of a slice of strawberry cheesecake. The slice is rectangular, showing a thick layer of white cream with pink strawberry swirls, topped with fresh strawberries and a dollop of whipped cream. It sits on a golden-brown crust. The slice is placed on a light-colored wooden cutting board. To the right of the slice, a silver fork is partially visible. In the background, more strawberries and a blurred green object are visible, suggesting a kitchen or bakery setting.

And when we're stressed or distracted –
we're more likely to succumb to
immediate urges.

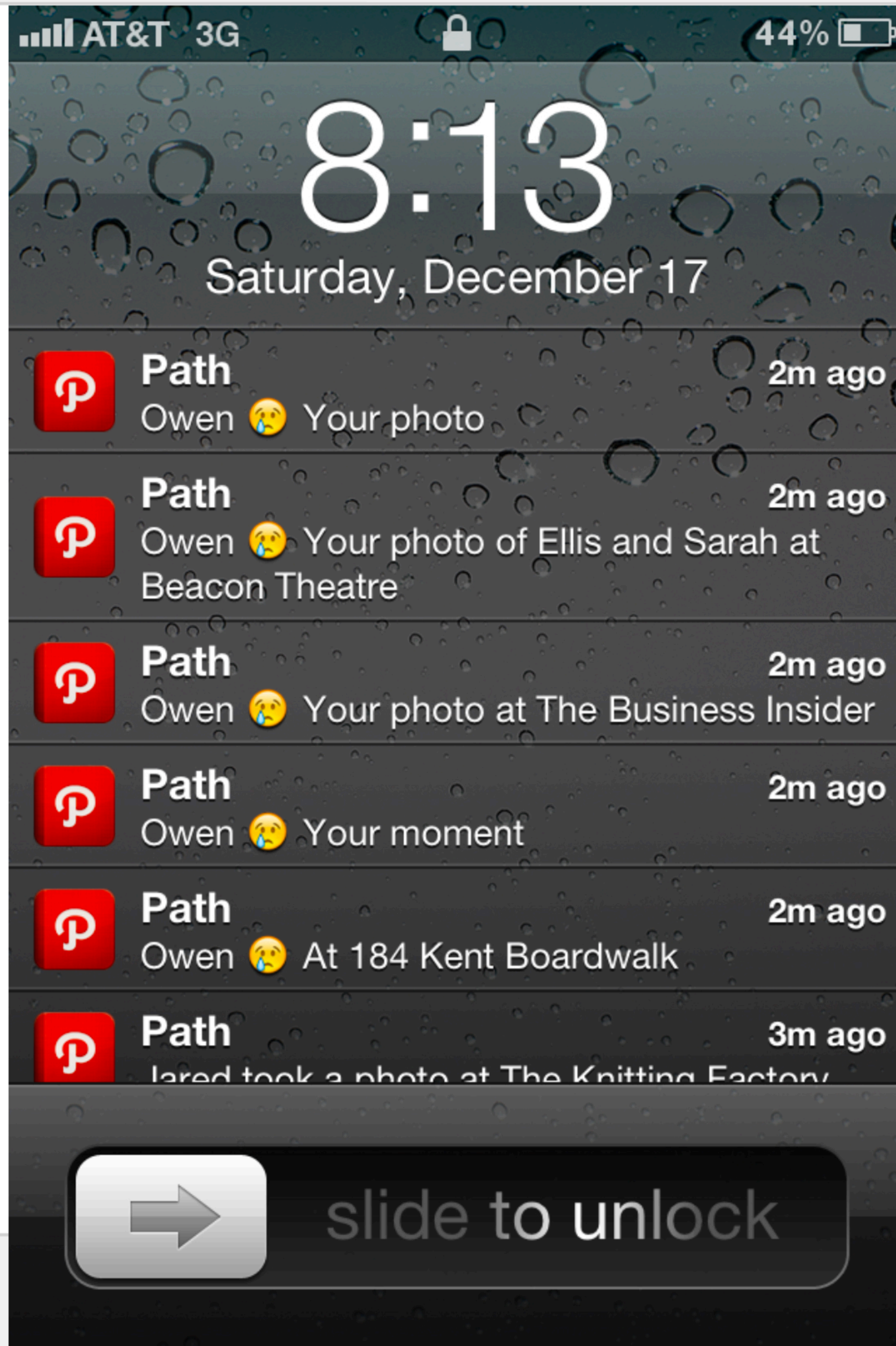
Do we really know what we're
doing to people?

Instead, what if we designed to
**minimize stress and create
calmer states of mind?**

The problem is...

A man and a woman in business suits are in a starting crouch on a track. The man is in the foreground, looking directly at the camera with a determined expression. The woman is in the background, also in a starting crouch, looking slightly away from the camera. They are both wearing dark suits. The track has white and yellow lines. The background is slightly blurred.

Successful products compete by exploiting these vulnerabilities, so they can't remove them without sacrificing their success and growth.



...creating an
**arms race that
causes companies to
find more reasons to
steal people's time**



**A tragedy of the commons
that destroys our common silence,
and ability to think.**

So...

what's the solution to all this?



As a former entrepreneur, I can say that niche startups are **too small** to tackle this challenge...

Change like this can only happen **top-down**,
from large institutions that define the
standards for millions of people...

Google


And we're in **a great position** to
do something about all this...



ANDROID

We set the notification standards on
>50% of the world's mobile phones...

(4 trillion notifications sent last year on iOS alone)



we shape **> 11 billion interruptions** to
people's lives ***every day...***
(this is nuts!)



**Millions of knowledge workers spend
1/3rd of their day in our email product.**



**Hundreds of millions of people
live in Chrome every day**

...and we have **fortunate** incentives.



Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky


Unlike many companies, our primary business model is **fulfilling human needs (searches)**, and *getting people on with their lives.*



not stealing more
of your time.

A middle-aged man with glasses and a light beard, wearing a white lab coat over a blue shirt and a light-colored tie. He has a stethoscope around his neck and is smiling warmly at the camera. He is sitting at a desk with his hands clasped in front of him. On the desk, there is a glass of water, a keyboard, and some papers. The background is a blurred office setting with warm lighting.

Just like we trust our doctors to do what's
best and healthy for us

A group of medical students in blue gowns and white caps with red stoles, performing a ritual during a graduation ceremony. They are standing in rows, holding white books and raising their right hands. The background is dark, and the students are illuminated by stage lights.

who swear by the hippocratic oath to
use their knowledge ethically and to do
no harm.

...and just like we trust farmers to
sell us **safe and healthy food**



...and **ask careful questions** before making decisions that could affect our health





...because all we
can do is buy what
shows up at the
supermarket

Consumers

trust

us



...to make **conscious decisions**

**...since we choose the systems
and defaults that shape their lives**

We already care about **speed and productivity**,
and helping users **get sh*t done...**



Let's also care about **minimizing distractions and interruptions.**

We can design to reduce the
volume and frequency of interruptions.

We can design to be **respectful** about *when* to notify users— let it wait, unless it's important

We can design to **keep users focused**, by putting temptations further away when they're trying to accomplish goals.

We can batch up notifications & messages into
digests by default, instead of one at a time

A close-up photograph of a thorny rose branch. The branch is light brown and covered in sharp, reddish-brown thorns. Several green leaves are visible, some showing signs of being pruned or damaged. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

Clearly, these are thorny issues...



There are tough moral questions,
competition-driven industry pressures,
and **nuanced human psychology** factors...



KENNEDY

... but just like we had a team to
standardize our design *aesthetic*
across the company ...

We could have a team to
standardize our design *ethics* and
define best practices to minimize distraction.

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Breaking: BlackBerry Z10 review: a new life, or life support?

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NEXT STORY



Lenovo may be a suitor for RIM's smartphone business

ANDROID APPS & SOFTWARE WEB & SOCIAL EXCLUSIVE FEATURE VIDEO

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COMMENTS

Google's New Team Tackles Distraction and Consumer Well-Being

A new group is making sure Google's products aren't just great, but actually make people happy.

By **Verge Staff** on January 24, 2013 12:06 pm



But we can't wait any longer
to figure it out.

Join the Community:

Attention-Respectful

Googlers

(...now 1500+ Googlers and growing!)

or visit:

[go/attention-respectful](https://www.google.com/go/attention-respectful)

Send in the most distracting
aspects of products in your life.

(screenshots or descriptions are fine)

How would you change them?

How could we do more to respect the
user's attention?

And share this presentation with your
co-workers... start a conversation!

[go/distraction](#)

Appendix & Links

There's of great thinkers and experts who would be eager to help us work through these tough questions (from many different ages, backgrounds, genders)...

- BJ Fogg
- Linda Stone
- Kelly McGonigal
- Kathy Sierra
- Dan Ariely
- Daniel Kahneman
- Sherry Turkle
- Gloria Mark
- Neema Moraveji, Stanford Calming Tech lab
- Wisdom 2.0 conference

Many even at Google!

- Hal Varian, Chief Economist @ Google
- John Boyd, author of "The Time Paradox"
- Joe Kraus ("[Culture of Distraction](#)", partner at Google Ventures)
- Google Ideas

There are some great books, articles, etc on the subjects of Willpower, Ego Depletion, Habit formation, Addiction, Pleasure, Psychophysics, Free Will, etc:

- "The Illusion of Conscious Will" by Daniel Wegner
- "Amusing Ourselves to Death" by Neil Postman
- "Thinking Fast And Slow" by Daniel Kahneman
- "Flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- "The Willpower Instinct" by Kelly McGonigal
- "Compass of Pleasure" by David Linden
- "Alone Together" by Sherry Turkle
- "[Diagnosis: Email Apnea](#)" by Linda Stone
- "[Is Twitter TOO Good?](#)" by Kathy Sierra
- "The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change your Life" by John Boyd and Philip Zimbardo